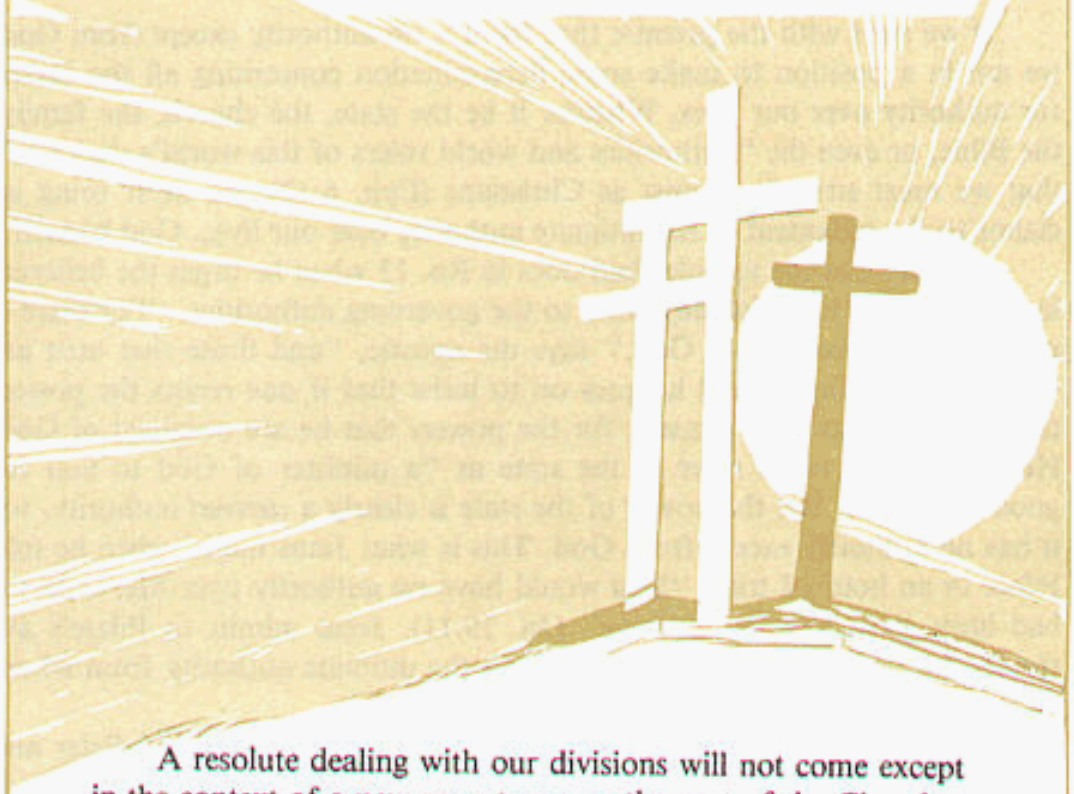
RESTORATION REVIEW



A resolute dealing with our divisions will not come except in the context of a new acceptance on the part of the Churches of the obligation to bring the Gospel to every creature; nor will the world believe that Gospel until it sees more evidence of its power to make us one. These two tasks — mission and unity — must be prosecuted together in indissoluble relation to one another.

—Leslie Newbigin

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In What Way Is the Bible Authoritative?

Volume 29, No. 3 Leroy Garrett, Editor March, 1987

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The Sense of Scripture: Studies in Interpretation . . .

IN WHAT WAY IS THE BIBLE AUTHORITATIVE?

There is no authority except from God. — Ro. 13:1

If we start with the premise that there is no authority except from God, we are in a position to make some determination concerning all the claims for authority over our lives. Whether it be the state, the church, the family, the Bible, or even the "authorities and world rulers of this world's darkness" that we must struggle against as Christians (Eph. 6:12), we must bring all claims to the judgment of the ultimate authority over our lives, God himself.

That is what the apostle Paul does in Ro. 13 when he urges the believers in pagan Rome to be in subjection to the governing authorities. "For there is no authority except from God," says the apostle, "and those that exist are established by God," and he goes on to insist that if one resists the powers that be, he resists God himself, for the powers that be are ordained of God. He goes so far as to refer to the state as "a minister of God to you for good" (verse 4). But the power of the state is clearly a *derived* authority, for it has no authority except from God. This is what Jesus meant when he told Pilate in an hour of trial: "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above" (Jn. 19:11). Jesus admits to Pilate's authority over him, but only in reference to the ultimate authority from whom all authority is derived.

This conflict is evident when the rulers in Jerusalem ordered Peter and John to speak no more in the name of Christ. Their reply was "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19). The apostles were confident that the rulers would acknowledge that God is the ultimate Ruler. "You be the judge" they could safely say. God comes first! And so when the showdown finally came the apostles could stand their ground: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts *5:29).*

Here we have our rule in all questions of authority: *We must obey God rather than men.* We all concede that a child may have to choose God over his own parents, a soldier over his commanding officer, a wife over her husband, a member over his church. And may we not add that a believer must put God over the Bible? He may, for instance, read in the Bible "Go sell all that you have and give it to the poor." That may or may not be for him. The Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, decided that it was for him and acted accordingly, to the dismay of his family. But we are to ask if that is really what God wants us to do in our situation in this day and time.

In 1 Cor. 15:27 Paul reveals that God has put all things in subjection to Christ, but he adds: "It is evident that He (God) is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him (Christ)." If God is the head of Christ, as the apostle does not hesitate to say in 1 Cor. 11:3, then God is certainly the head of the Bible. Since we as Christians believe that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," we see no conflict between God and Christ, for what Christ is and does God is and does, and so the authority of one is the authority of the other. But this is not true of anything that is the work of man, which includes the Bible, however empowered it may have been by the Holy Spirit. We cannot equate the authority of the Bible with the authority of God as we can the authority of Christ and God, for the Bible is an earthen vessel. God is perfect, infallible, and infinite. The Bible as a human product is not. And so we worship and adore God and not the Bible.

To be sure, as believers we obey the Bible, but always in reference to the authority of God. If the Bible was brought to us by an angel directly from heaven, having been dictated word-for-word by God himself, so that its contents would be nothing less and nothing more than the actual words of God, then we could equate the authority of the Bible and the authority of God. But the Bible is clearly not that kind of book, and it is evident that God did not intend it to be such. We must study it in the light of the fact that it is the work of scores of writers in different languages over a period of many centuries, and all this in the context of widely-diverse cultural and historical circumstances. And so there are various kinds of literature, including history, prophecy, apocalyptic, biography, poetry, personal letters.

Moreover, there is much that is abstruse and difficult, subject to varying interpretations. It is hardly a simple book. It is in fact many books or documents, which in any serious study pose many problems and difficulties. And yet the church has always insisted that the message it bears comes through clearly enough, and therein lies its authority. Like the old phonograph records marked with "The Master's Voice" that came through loud and clear despite the static, the Bible conveys that story that God intends, and the jars and conflicts only enhance the truth that God works through weak humanity in revealing his glorious purposes.

In determining in what sense the Bible is authoritative we need to decide what we mean by authority. We can do this by substituting other words for authority, such as that which we find impelling, necessary, or urgent. The authoritative voice is one we have to listen to for our own good. Take the Yul Brynner plea against smoking, which is the most moving thing I've ever seen on TV. While dying of lung cancer due to smoking, he made this tape for those who follow in his steps. He is now a voice from the grave, *Don't smoke!*, he warns.

That is authority! Or take the exemplary life of Mother Teresa as she served as an angel of mercy among the untouchables of India. Her example impels us to show more love and mercy to those around us. That too is authority!

Or we can think of authority in terms of God speaking to us, which is the word of God. God may speak to us (in some general way at least) through nature and through our own conscience. He may speak through Mother Teresa or Yul Brynner. Or when you are tempted to sacrifice your integrity God may speak to you through poetry — "To thine own self be true" (Shakespeare). He might speak to you through song, art, or history.

But the church has always believed that God speaks to us in a special way through the Bible. It is not his only revelation but it is his *special* revelation, eclipsed only by Christ himself, who stands as the only perfect and complete revelation of God. As the wonderful Person of the Bible, Jesus Christ is the personification of the authority of God. Indeed, Jesus Christ is our authority, for he is the urgent, necessary, and impelling force in our lives. It is from Christ that the Scriptures derive their authority. They are authoritative only as they either directly or indirectly point to and reflect the Person of Christ, or as they (particularly in the Old Testament) reveal the will of God and bring us into closer fellowship with him.

Why is the 23rd Psalm the world's favorite portion of Scripture, whether to the Jew, the Eastern Orthodox, the Protestant and the Catholic, and even the inquiring skeptic? Because its lines have a commanding impact and a sense of urgent reality. These lines touch every life at one time or another:

> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow
> of death,
> I fear no evil;
> for thou art with me;
> thy rod and thy staff,
> they comfort me.

This does not say that God will deliver us from such trials as tragedy and death, but that he will be with us in whatever happens, and that he cares when we are hurting. He will comfort us like a faithful and loving shepherd. This is the word of God to us because it reveals the nature of God and brings us into closer fellowship with God.

Now read these lines from Ps. 91:

A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand;
but it will not come near you.

You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.
Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
the Most High your habitation,
no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.

Unlike Ps. 23 this psalm says that if one makes God his refuge he will never have to walk in the valley of the shadow of death. A pestilence like famine or cancer or AIDS may cause a thousand to fall at your side, but not *you*, if you trust in God. You can watch the wicked suffer but you won't have to. *No evil shall befall you! No scourge will come to your house!*

Would you read these verses to the godly couple whose child is dying of leukemia? Or to those Christians rotting in prison behind the Iron Curtain? Or to the man who has lost his job for standing up for a principle?

While the word of God does speak to us in other parts of this same Psalm, it is difficult to make the above lines a message from God. The lines simply are not true. No evil shall befall you, indeed! The truth is, as Ps. 23 makes clear, evil will befall us in this world, but God will be with us and see us through. It so happens that Satan quoted from these lines when he tempted our Lord. Jesus did not seem to believe that "the angels will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against the stone" (the lines following those above) if one is fool enough to jump from a precipice. Such lines may have some poetic value in pointing up the providential care of God, but taken as they read they hardly speak to us in an authoritative way.

Are there not degrees to what is authority to us, if by this we refer to that which is urgent, impelling, and life-changing? While all truths in the Bible are equally true, they are not all equally important. And are there not levels of authoritative persons? While I respect the authority of Isaiah as a prophet, I take the authority of Paul as an apostle of Christ as greater, and I take the authority of Christ as greater still.

And within each of these there are degrees of authoritative impact. When Isaiah says, "This is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (66:2) it impacts my life far more that when he says, "God will shake his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion" (10:32). And when Paul says, "Love bears all things,

believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7) he speaks with greater authority than when he writes, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all," which is in the same letter.

This means that authority has to do with power, and these two words are often used interchangeably, such as when Jesus says, "All authority has been given unto me" in Mt. 28:18, which some versions render as "All power has been given unto me." Authority implies the power to act. A law is meaningless and has no authority if it has no power of enforcement. So, verses in the Bible are not authoritative simply because they are in the Bible, but only as they reach out to us in power and impact our lives as the word of God, for there is no authority (power) except from God. So, it is the power-packed Scriptures that are authoritative. If a passage does not "get our attention" by warning us, admonishing us, encouraging us, redeeming us, strengthening us, or giving us hope, then it has no power and therefore no authority. It is still Scripture when it only narrates, but it is the word of God only when God is in someway speaking.

I venture to add that what is true of Isaiah and Paul is also true of our Lord, that there are levels or degrees of authority (power) in what even he says in Scripture. Or to put it another way, while everything Jesus says is true some things are more significant than other things. Most of us are moved by the likes of "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" and not so much by "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house" (Mk. 6:4). The latter passage is, in fact, baffling, for surely we are not to conclude that a prophet (minister?, editor?, teacher?) cannot be respected in his own town and among his own kin. Was not Isaiah, who lived all his life in Jerusalem and was listened to by king and people alike, honored in his home town? And does that passage mean that a prophet *will* be honored other than at home? It would seem to be closer to the truth to say that a prophet is seldom honored whether at home or abroad!

That saying, purportedly by Jesus, is a good example of how a passage must be seen in its context and how cultural factors make a difference. There were similar proverbs among the Greeks and Romans to the effect that a great man is not appreciated by his own people, and if Jesus made that statement he too must have been using it as a proverb and applying it to that particular situation in his home town, Nazareth. Or it may be that Mark used the proverb as an explanation of why Jesus was rejected in Nazareth while being honored elsewhere — for the time being, that is!

But the authority of Jesus Christ stands apart in Scripture, for he is our authority (the power in our lives) not only for what he says but for who and what he was and is and forever will be. His very life and example is our authority. All others in Scripture derive

their authority from him and from "the Father of lights." And all Scripture must be interpreted in reference to Jesus and the One who sent him to redeem the world, for the point of Scripture is to bring us into fellowship with God and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Two more points should be made before closing this study. One is that the authority of the Bible is not simply subjective, that is, it does not have authority only in one's mind, however important that is. It has authority as it stands written. When Paul spoke these words to the pagans of Athens, "God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31), he named the great truths to which the God of heaven holds all people responsible. It is God's great philanthropy: the call for repentance, a judgment to come, the fact of Christ in history, and all this centered in the resurrection of Christ. This is authority, and if men do not accept it they should, and they will be held accountable. So there is "the authority" to which all men are to be in subjection whether they acknowledge it or not.

The final point is that while the authority of the Bible is both subjective and objective, that is, it is both *in* Scripture and *in* the human heart (or should be), the final arbiter in reference to any question has to be our own conscience. Does the authority of Scripture mandate that I should believe in Christ and be baptized? Should I have an abortion? Should I quit drinking? We ourselves in our own conscience have to answer such questions, not a preacher or a priest or a church council. God speaks to us through Scripture, but only we can decide in our own hearts what he means by what he says and how it applies to us. Two people may look at the same authority — the example of Christ — and one becomes a pacifist and the other a soldier. And both *could* be right. In any event, we all have a Supreme Court in which the final ruling is made as to what God means by what he says, or what the spirit and example of Christ mandates in any given situation. One might follow his conscience and be wrong, but he must follow his conscience. It should be a conscience quickened, educated, and humbled by a sincere study of the Scriptures. When that is the case he will usually be right in his decisions, and when he is mistaken they will only be errors of judgment and understanding and not errors of the heart.

> The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
> a broken and contrite heart, O God,
> thou wilt not despise. (Ps. 51:17)

Does that passage not quicken your mind and impose on you a sense of urgency, a truth that you cannot afford to ignore? That is what the authority (power) of the Bible means. — *the Editor*

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IS THERE A HERMENEUTICS OF SILENCE?

(The following letter explains itself. H. A. (Buster) Dobbs is associate editor of the *Firm Foundation.* I share this letter with our readers in hopes that it might help us overcome a serious mistake we have long made: making acappella music a condition for Christian fellowship, and insisting that instrumental music is a sin based upon the silence of the New Testament. This journal believes that the use or non-use of instruments in corporate worship is a matter of opinion or congregational preference and not an essential of the faith, and therefore should not be made a test of fellowship, as the *Firm Foundation* holds. - *the Editor)*

Dear brother Dobbs:

Since I am presently writing a series in my own journal on Biblical hermeneutics, I was particularly interested to learn from your editorial in the *Firm Foundation* that you are to speak on "The Hermeneutic of Silence" at Forum Five at Cincinnati Bible Seminary next month. Since my readers may have some interest in what I would say about the silence of Scripture, I thought I would kill the proverbial bird with two stones and make this an essay for my paper as well as a letter to you. But it is first of all a letter to you, for I believe we editors should be in touch and exchange our wares in the marketplace of ideas.

First of all, I am at a loss to see how there can be a hermeneutics of silence, for there has to be something said before there can be an interpretation of what is said. One may as well speak of "The Geography of Nowhere" or "The Physics of Nothing" as to speak of the hermeneutics of silence. Hermeneutics has to do with meaning and nothing more, and how can one make meaning out of nothing?

Perhaps you are using the wrong word, for there would be some defense for such a topic as "The Importance of the Silence of Scripture," or "What Are We to Do When the Bible Is Silent?" But with the topic you now have you are dead in the water before you start, for the simple reason that there can be no such thing as an interpretation of what is not said. I am confident that you will find no rule of interpretation, whether of the Bible or of general literature, that has to do with silence, for all rules have to do with the sense of words.

But if we are to be literate in the Bible we are to know what it does not say as well as what it does say. I should know, for instance, that it says nothing about gambling, social drinking, or smoking. And it does not speak explicitly of weightier moral issues such as

slavery, segregation, abortion, sterilization, or euthanasia. And it uses no such terminology as the trinity, transubstantiation, purgatory, or extreme unction. It gives no theory of inspiration, no rules of hermeneutics, and even the word "Bible" nowhere appears.

Whatever document we may be studying it may be important to know what it does not say as well as what it does say, such as the Constitution of the United States. Some insist that that grand old document has endured because its creators were careful not to be too specific. When I was writing my Ph.D. thesis on The New Jerusalem my professor instructed me to find out what the Dead Sea Scrolls said about my subject. After a careful search I told him that the Dead Sea Scrolls say nothing at all about the New Jerusalem. To which he replied, "Very well. You need to know that."

So with all Biblical study. It may be significant that of all the references Paul makes to Jesus he never mentions the virgin birth (or, more accurately, the miraculous conception). And the gay community does not let us forget that of all the sins that Jesus names he makes no reference to homosexuality. And while it may be less important we have to concede that the Bible does not tell us how to select elders, and nothing is said about trustees, owning property, or building edifices.

But once it is granted that the silence of Scripture has some significance there is still no basis for a hermeneutics of silence. The only conclusion we can draw from the fact that the Bible is silent on a given subject is that the Bible is silent on that subject. Silence itself implies no sin, for sin is a transgression of law and there is no law in silence. If something the Bible is silent about is sin, such as gambling, it is not the silence that makes it a sin but something the Bible *does* say, some principle it sets forth or some ideal it imposes. Is not this the nature of sin, that it violates the spirit of Christ as revealed in Scripture? So, we would all agree that the Bible does not have to specifically name something as sin for it to be a sin. It would also follow that something cannot be named a sin only because "it is not authorized in the Bible." Is having trustees and owning property authorized?

The same week you published your editorial about silence the *Guardian of Truth* published a debate between two of our brothers on whether a plurality of cups for Communion is scriptural. One of them says to the other, "We know by his own admission, that a plurality of cups is not taught by example, command, or necessary inference." He goes on throughout the article to argue very much as you do about the silence of the Bible, except that "the practice" that concerns him is different from the one that concerns you. He writes about the silence in regard to cups and you write about the silence in regard to instruments of music. Like yourself, he even names the year that the cups were first introduced into Churches of Christ, and he names the culprits who did it, except that he refers to one innovation and you to another. But both of you raise the same question, "Where does the

Bible speak of it?" Your case is of course different from the anti-cups brother in that he can range throughout Scripture and ask for book, chapter, and verse, while you restrict yourself to the New Testament. The anti-instrumental music position has to explain the numerous instances of instruments being used in the praise of God in the Old Testament, and particularly in Psalms which are not necessarily tied to the ritual of the Mosaic law. The average person has difficulty comprehending how an instrument could be the great sin Churches of Christ make it when the Bible plainly declares in Ps. 150:1-2:

> Praise Him for His mighty acts
> Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!
> Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
> Praise Him with the lute and harp!
> Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;
> Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!

This makes the silence of the New Testament in reference to instruments a different kind of problem. Since the Old Testament so overwhelmingly exalts instruments (and in reference to praising God, not in terms of animal sacrifices and ceremonial laws), one could conclude that if in the New Testament God changed his mind all that much and thus viewed an instrument used in praising him as a sin that he would have said so. If there is a "law of silence," it has to work both ways.

Back to our brother who objects to a plurality of cups on the ground of silence (and because it plainly says, "Jesus took the cup"), don't we have to concede that he is right, that the Bible is silent about cups and that they are an innova

tion — introduced by no one less than C. E. Holt and G. C. Brewer?

Are we not left with but one conclusion: *each of us must treat the silence of the Bible according to his own conviction, and not impose his scruple upon others.* We all practice things and use things in our churches that are not mentioned in the Bible. When we make laws based on silence and impose them upon others as matters of faith we may be guilty of a far greater sin than using plastic cups or having a piano in our church. And yet those plastic cups are a sin to some of our people. I respect that and understand it, and I would not have them sin by violating their conscience. I would only ask that they not make a law of God out of their scruple.

So with instruments. It is proper for us to remain acappella in our singing, and it can be based upon how we conceive the silence of the New Testament, but we are wrong when we make a law of God for all others and make them sinners if they use an instrument.

The Church of Christ case against instruments is having a hard time of it if we still have to march out that old saw of Noah and the gopher wood, as you indicate you plan to do in Cincinnati. It is hard to believe that our editors today can be so shallow as to write what you did, as follows:

> God instructed Noah to build the ark of gopher wood and was silent as to any other kind of wood. Therefore Noah was limited to the use of gopher wood in the construction of the ark. Had God told Noah to make the box-like boat out of wood, without specifying a particular kind of wood, then Noah could have acceptably used any kind of wood. But God required gopher wood and it would have been a denial of God, and his authority, to use any other kind of wood. Silence, in this connection, was prohibitive, because God had spoken.

The problem with this argument is that it proves more than you want it to prove, for everyone who seeks to make a law out of his opinion can use it. "Jesus took *the cup.*

" Is that not specific enough? Then why your plastic cups of a different kind and size? Did not God give us a hymnal in the Bible, the book of Psalms? Why then your man-made song book, songs written by Catholic bishops? And why all the Sunday School literature of a different kind? What's wrong in simply taking the Bible? And how about your Sunday School, an arrangement of a different kind than the "all present" assembly in I Cor. 14? And on and on it goes. Those who make the Noah and the gopher wood argument are very selective as to how they apply it.

Moreover, the Noah-gopher mentality misses the point. True, Noah followed God in building the ark insofar as God spoke. The question is, *Was Noah free to act according to his own judgment where God was silent?* Could he use an awl in making holes in the boards, a saw, a hammer? If available to him, could he not have used a table saw, a power saw, or even a computer in building the ark? With your "law of silence'" mentality, I can hear you protesting to Noah, "Now wait a minute here, patriarch, did God tell you to use a table saw or a computer?

We all take liberties with the silence of the New Testament in our corporate worship. If Churches of Christ can use a tuning fork, round notes, shaped notes, hymnals, multi-part harmony, a song leader (with his hand signals), amplifiers, and sometimes even humming, none of which is "authorized," then we should be able to bear with our brethren who choose to add an instrument to that list.

But you indicate that you will repeat at Cincinnati the old argument that we should never have made in the first place: that God has specified a particular kind of music (singing) and this excludes any other kind of music (instrumental music). The reason the argument

should never have been made is that it assumes what cannot be proved, that one kind of music (specified) excludes another kind of music (not specified). The truth is that one kind of music may aid or elevate another kind

— and we all practice precisely that.

Have you never heard of *sheet* music and *written* music? You use two different kinds of music every Sunday at your church: vocal music and written music. Our dear, aged brother Tillet S. Teddlie has written lots of music, and when he composed "When We Meet In Sweet Communion" it was music, *sheet* music before it was ever sung, a "different kind" from vocal music. Why do you have sheet music, brother Dobbs, when the New Testament is silent about that kind of music? If you can have written music to aid your singing, why cannot your brother have instrumental music to aid his singing? Consult your dictionary as to the meaning of music.

According to your editorial, you are going to tell Forum Five that "Unity must be based on truth." But truth in this context is not limited to those things that are clearly stated in the Bible as essential, but it includes your "hermeneutic of silence." Your brothers in Cincinnati would all agree with you if you defined truth as "Thus saith the Lord," but you are making unity dependent on what the Bible says nothing about, and so you insist there can be no unity except on the basis of your anti-instrument position. This is what all sec

tarians do, as Thomas Campbell observed in his *Declaration and Address*, in that they predicate unity upon "what the kingdom of God does not consist," as he put it. This is why we have umpteen divisions among Churches of Christ, each arguing as you do that "Unity must be based on truth," and they pervert truth to mean everything from "wine only" Communion and "no sponsoring church" mission work to a particular theory of inspiration or of the millennium.

If by "Unity must be based on truth" you meant the general truths of the Christian faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, then you would stand in the grand tradition of those who have pled for the oneness of the church on the basis of "In essentials, unity; in non

-essentials, liberty; in all things, love," which includes the founders of the Stone-Campbell Movement. And that is the only plea for unity that has any meaning. If we have to wait until we see alike all these things that the Bible says nothing about to start with, then unity will always elude us. It only becomes a vain and insipid call for conformity.

I am confident that you will be received at Forum Five with forbearing love, and you are more likely to show that kind of spirit if you do not consider them your adversaries, as your use of 1 Cor. 16:9 implies. Paul was referring there to men who were enemies of Christ, while those in Cincinnati are your brothers in Christ and not your adversaries, and surely they are as faithful to Christ and you or I.

I hope you will change your mind about making your "hermeneutic of silence" a test of fellowship and a basis for unity, and that you will lay the Noah-gopher mentality to rest. If you insist in parading those old bromides once more, I think you should at least blush.

Sincerely,

Leroy Garrett

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TO PREACHERS WHO WOULD LEAVE, ETC.

(Sometimes we editors best express ourselves in the letters we write, not for the public necessarily, but to those who write to us about their problems or their complaints. Here are two letters that I "saved back" from recent correspondence that may prove helpful to our general readership. A common problem among our churches is disillusioned and discouraged preachers. One reason for this, especially among Churches of Christ, is the sectarianism they have to put up with. It is common for our more "open" ministers to seek liberation by finding a more "open" church. The first letter was to such a minister. The second letter is quite different from the first in that it is to an older minister-professor from whom I purchase books. When he scribbled a personal note on the bottom of an invoice expressing regret that I was no longer "one of us," I thought a response was in order. It did not keep me from paying what I owed! While the parties involved probably would not object to my identifying them, I will not do so, not only Out of deference to them but also because it is not necessary for the purpose at hand, your interest and edification. —*the Editor*)

LETTER 1

Sometimes it helps for us to realize that the problem that is bugging us is a common one. That may not ease the trauma of the problem, but it helps us to see that if others along the way have either worked their way through the problem or have found grace to bear it then we too can handle it.

You have something important going for you in that you know how to count your blessings in spite of your problem. You have your wife, friends, and above all the Lord on your side. And therein will be part of the answer to your problem: think positively about life, keeping your blessings before you, and don't allow yourself to become sour or bitter.

It also helps to realize that there are no jobs without problems - not even in the White House! And probably no job that does not have some frustration.

But once all that is said the fact remains that you have a frustrating ministry and you are looking for an answer. One answer is that there is no answer, for as long as you are dealing with people and especially church folk, you will have frustrations galore. Jesus himself had your problem, especially Jesus, for he was stymied at every turn in his efforts to make people whole. He found his answer in losing himself in his Father's will - by completely being absorbed with "not my will but thine be done." And when it comes down to it that is the only answer there is.

You can say with full assurance that the Lord knows all about it, and you can lay it all before him. You are, after all, his bondservant, so in one sense the problem is not yours but his.

Take the days one by one and do not be too concerned about what may lie down the road. Make every day a thing of joy, learn to appreciate the little things, take time for children and the aged, give attention to those that others ignore, take people into your confidence and share with them the joys of simple living. It may help to think of Jesus being at your side in all these things, for he is indeed with you and in you.

Resist worry and downheartedness as you would resist Satan himself. Keep saying yes to life and to your job. You will find that you have no problem that cannot be transcended by your resolve to do God's will, let come what may. Victory comes to those that hang tough amidst tough times.

As for the sectarian spirit, which can be so depressing if we allow it to be, we can take heart that Jesus had the same problem, and he faced it by praying, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." In the end this is your answer and mine.

To liberate our people from sectarianism we have to be there with them amidst their sectarianism, and seek to understand it and to respond to it with forbearing love. Nothing is gained by running from it.

Finally, you will find your answer in the house of prayer, as you move from room to room, praising God, thanking him, praying for those who are not yet liberated, calling by name those who would abuse you. There can be no defeat for one who lingers in the house of prayer.

LETTER 2

Your note on the invoice, "Wish you had stayed with us," caught my eye, and I wonder what you could mean by that. It sounds sectarian, but I don't believe you intended that.

Where, dear brother, do you suppose I have gone? Along with my parents and grandparents before me I am a life-long member of the non-instrumental Church of Christ, and that is the only denomination I have attended in the *25* years I have lived in Denton, Texas. I am a graduate of not one but two Church of Christ colleges, and for 35 years I have been editor of a journal that circulates primarily among these people, and it deals with the life, faults, virtues, and hopes of these people, along with the larger fellowship of those within the Stone-Campbell heritage. How can one be more Church of Christ than that?

Now if you mean I have changed my mind about some things through the years and no longer believe, for instance, that those in Churches of Christ are the only Christians or that we are the only true church; and believe that we have been less than faithful to our great historical heritage and that we have been wrong in making instrumental music a test of fellowship, and that we have in fact been sectarian about a lot of things - and have said so - then you are right about my situation. I am no longer with you if that is where you are.

But how about others, such as Reuel Lemmons and Rubel Shelley, who are saying similar things? Would you drop them a note expressing regret that they are no longer with us?

Surely you are not implying that we are not to have critics among us or that we all have to toe some party line in order to be "in," whatever that is made to mean. If we are all in Christ and are seeking to follow him to the best that is within us, is that not ground enough for common acceptance?

So, good friend, I am where you are, in Christ Jesus, and until conviction persuades me otherwise I will continue to be a member of a Church of Christ, which I consider part of the Body of Christ at large. But I reserve the right, particularly as an editor, to commend our people when I believe they are right and exhort them to change when I believe them to be wrong.

I thank God that for all these years, even since Freed-Hardeman days, we have shared the common faith and glory in a common hope. So long as that is the case it is not necessary for either of us to go anywhere.

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WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE INNER PEACE

Occasionally there is something in the flood of materials that cross my desk that especially impresses me, so much so that I want to pass it along to others. It usually states some gem of truth better than I could say it myself. Or it is something that I had never thought about in my own limited panning for gold.

Such an item comes from the Houston Center for Attitudinal Healing and was submitted to *Life Line*, a publication of the Churches of Christ Medical Center Chaplaincy, by Hede Marker, and entitled "Symptoms of Inner Peace."

Eleven signs or symptoms of inner peace are listed. I list them here for your consideration:

1. A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than on fears based on past experiences.
2. An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.
3. A loss of interest in judging other people.
4. A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others.
5. A loss of interest in conflict.
6. A loss of the ability to worry. (This is a very serious symptom.)
7. Frequent overwhelming episodes of appreciation.
8. Frequent attacks of smiling.
9. An increased tendency to let things happen rather than to make them happen.
10. Contented feelings of connectedness with others and with nature.
11. An increased susceptibility to the love extended by others as well as an uncontrollable urge to extend it.

My reaction to these is that they are so appropriate to our time and condition that they could be given other descriptions, such as principles of emotional maturity or even rules for living. And would they not serve as ways to make peace among churches and avenues to Christian unity? And what would these ideals do for a family that took them seriously? Would they not put our divorce courts out of business along with dope pushers and child abusers?

I am impressed that the one who wrought out these ideals must have done so on the anvil of long years of experience in being human, and he delved into the inmost sanctum of human needs, desires, and impulses. He or she understands for instance, as numbers 3 and 4 suggest, that our carnal nature inclines us to be busy cutting others down to our size. We are inclined to control others in one way or another, perhaps because we know, without admitting it, that we ourselves are out of control.

Even more important perhaps is the insight that is as old as the Greek philosophers, that the unexamined life is not worth living. When we are busy reforming ourselves we do not have to be in conflict with others, as number 5 is telling us, and this is the only way we will ever freely relate to others and to nature, which number 10 calls for.

Also significant is the understanding that if life is real for us we must be inner-directed rather than other-directed. It is not the real self that is motivated by fear of disapproval or rejection by the party. We are never so unauthentic as when we fear what man might do to us. So number 1 is essential for self-authenticity. Ps. 118:6 gives a liberating truth that finds its way into the New Testament as well (Heb. 13:6): "The Lord is on my side: I will not fear. What can man do to me?" And rule 6 is showing us that such a trust in the Lord frees us from worry. Worry is wrong because it is a sign of distrust.

Last of all, these principles reflect the true nature of joy, which is evident in old-fashioned appreciation of the simple things in life, which makes smiling not only real but contagious. Joy and love are twins born of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. - *the Editor*

LET THE UNMARRIED MARRY

Cecil Hook

"Dear Paul: In the new relationship into which you have led us women, we readily repudiate the local religion served by prostitute priestesses in the temple of Venus. We recognize the degrading nature of such sexual experiences for both women and men, but how are we to look upon marriage and conjugality now? May we continue in these relationships while belonging to Christ?"

Some such questions were asked the apostle by the Corinthians. If we had the exact questions, we might better understand his answers. I propose the above questions in view of Paul's preface to his answers, that preface being in 1 Corinthians 6. Commonly, a gap is left between the sixth and seventh chapters, but let us consider the possibility that Paul is laying some groundwork in the sixth chapter for his answers in the seventh.

In verse 9, Paul lists sexual sins with idolatry, no doubt, because they were very much a part of the religion in their community with their temple supported by a thousand prostitute priestesses. Although some Corinthians might have argued that God made both our passionate sexual nature and also the means of satisfying it, hence "all things are lawful," Paul countered that "The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." They were now members of Christ who must not make themselves members of a prostitute, lest they become one with her and the temple that sponsored her.

They had become one with Christ. Never could the Christian female be a priestess of their temple nor could the male become joined with the prostitute and what her temple represented for they themselves had become temples - temples in which the Spirit of God lives. To become one with a prostitute would be a sin against one's own body which had become a temple of God.

Could sexual expression have any place in these new temples? Yes, for God intended that each should have a conjugal partner. One partner was not to refuse the other on the grounds that he or she was now joined to Christ and could not rightly become joined to another person.

The unmarried, having no rightful sexual fulfillment, tend to be aflame with passion. God recognizes this, and he does not deny any person the right of a companion. So, Paul says that the unmarried may marry. But who are these unmarried ones? There are three kinds: (1) those who have never been married, (2) widows, and (3) divorced persons (Compare the use of *agamos*, unmarried/single, in 7:8-11). Now, wait a minute, Paul! You don't mean that divorced people may remarry; you must mean "let them marry, except for the divorced!" Paul makes no exceptions. Let the unmarried marry.

Do not verses 10-11 deny what I have just written about verses 8-9? No. We must go back to the context and the questions that were asked. This convert to Christ feels that, since she is joined to Christ as one with him, even as a sexual partner in a symbolic sense, she cannot be joined conjugally with her husband also. She feels strongly that she should refuse him sexually or even separate from him. Paul discourages that but, if she should separate on that grounds, she must not use it as a pious excuse to rid herself of her husband in order to take another. To prove her sincerity of purpose she must remain single or be reconciled to her husband.

Paul's instructions here are not concerning failed marriages, abused partners, desertions, or the tragic mistakes of young people in which cases the unity of marriage is already destroyed except for the legal divorcement. The destroying of the union of two whom God joined together is the sin, not the remarriage.

Paul assured them of the sanctity of their marriages even though they might be joined to unbelievers. Sexual relations with a spouse were not immoral or idolatrous even though the spouse might be a pagan. If the unbelieving partner, in retaliation to the companion's acceptance of Christ, chose to separate from the Christian, the brother or sister was not bound. That would put such a disciple back into the unmarried state covered in verses 8-9 where he or she would be free to marry again.

In this teaching, Paul does not call upon anyone to divorce a mate. They were to remain in the state in which they were called. They did not have to try to change their circumcised/ uncircumcised, slave/free, or married/ unmarried state in order to be joined with Christ as a temple of the Spirit. "So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God." None were living in adultery." To our surprise, Paul does not even mention adultery in his teaching about marriage and divorce in this context.

Jesus' teachings about marriage, divorce, and remarriage were explanations of the regulations of the Law of Moses. Although the apostolic teachings on the subject might seem to be at odds with those of Jesus, that is not really true. A discussion of this would take much more time and space. I purloined some of my thoughts from tapes of classes taught by Oliver Howard in the Pepperdine Lectures in 1986. For a fuller discussion of Jesus' teachings I would have to plagiarize too evidently; so, I refer you to that source for many challenging and exciting concepts on the subject. — *1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, TX 78130*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

The Central Church of Christ in Irving (Dallas), Texas describes itself as "An Ecumenical Fellowship" on its sign alongside the busy freeway to the DFW Airport. In a recent issue of the church's bulletin the pulpit minister, James Carter, indicated what ecumenical means to him in practical terms. He is president of the Irving Ministerial Association and has a monthly breakfast with ministers of the area; he serves on the board of Irving Aid, which works for an emergency housing project; he has recently served as guest preacher at an independent church, a Baptist church, and a Presbyterian church, as well as chapel at Dallas Christian College. He also takes his turn as back-up chaplain at a nearby hospital. He recently read a paper on "What It Means to Be a Member of the Churches of Christ" to over 30 representatives of various churches in a Dallas ecumenical gathering. And he will be the speaker at this year's city Easter Sunrise Service. If all these facts do not impress you, this one will: he also recently met at his own church over coffee with a number of Church of Christ ministers. While he did not say, I take it that it was friendly, after all that!

One reaction to the recent ACU Lectureship comes from Arnold Hardin, editor of *The Persuader,* who wrote as follows: "Two of the main speakers emphasized the urgent need of churches to see to it that 'pulpit politicians' do not continue to be one of our major problems. Brethren, we had better face up to the matter with honesty or else the church is

going to continue its downward plunge. People are leaving 'us' and it is mostly because they are starving for a relationship with Christ and we are only feeding them the husks of a legalistic diet. As one of the speakers said, 'We allowed the Baptists to steal grace from us and that it is high time that we get it back!' Amens went up all over that huge audience! Many now believe that the 'New Day' for which many have been praying is coming much sooner than many of us had expected." If you wish to receive Arnold's mailout, which is free for the asking, the address is 2920 Prairie Creek, Dallas, TX 75227.

The Lord willing, I will attend a conference at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis on "Christians Only But Not the Only Christians: Reappraising the Disciples Tradition for the 21st Century," which will bring together leaders from Christian Churches as well as Disciples of Christ in a reappraisal of their common heritage, March 29-April 1. Over 600 people have expressed interest in attending, which has impressed the Disciple leadership that there is substantial interest in getting things moving again. The program from the seminary says, "Behind the conference is the conviction that Disciples have reached a crucial moment in our common life. Ours is a significant heritage of ministry and faithfulness . . . Yet there is a nagging sense that we have 'lost' part of our identity and purpose." The conference hopes to speak to the church's loss of members, a prevailing lethargy, and a superficial and divisive theology among other concerns. Perhaps I will be able to make an editorial comment on this significant event in our next issue.

Chester and Angela Woodhall, missionaries in Zambia, Africa, tell of a visit with that country's prime minister, Kebby Musokotwane, and the subject was the Church of Christ in Zambia, particularly how the church can become self-supporting without overseas help. The prime minister is himself a member of the Church of Christ, of which he says, "It is something that I cannot forget wherever I am in the world."

Olan Hicks, who moves somewhat among Churches of Christ in an effort to make them freer in Christ, explains in his *News a*nd Notes that he sometimes withholds names and places in his reports because one segment of the brotherhood still persecutes any brothers who waver from full submission to their decrees, especially schools and churches." He explains that after all these years he no longer fears such tactics but he ministers to people who can be hurt by their association with him. He expresses confidence that the "Pharisees" in the churches are losing their power to do harm. If you want on his mailing list, the address is Box 1253**,** Searcy, AR 72143.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

If there is one thing we in the Church of Christ need to re-examine it is hermeneutics. What a mess we have made of it! Often I have heard it said that the New Covenant is the New Law, which is the New Testament. Until we overcome such thinking there will never be unity, for this is "intellectual predestination," which is that only by being smart enough to interpret the Bible correctly can one be saved, and we are the ones who define what "correctly" means. — *New York*

I really appreciated "Is the Bible to be Taken Literally?" in the February issue. I think I will copy it and distribute it to my Sunday School class if that is acceptable with you. — *Frank Musgrave, First Christian Church, Chehalis, WA*

You and Carl Ketcherside have been two of the most influential people in my life and I am thankful that you have stirred up the brotherhood to think about where we are and where we're going. I go to Haiti in March with a Methodist group to build a school. Please pray for the work there. — *Norman Hawbaker, Decatur, IL.*

For many years we have respected and appreciated you for your work among us. We join with you in gratitude for our God who is our Rock, our Hope, our Refuge, our Tower of Strength. We weep with you as we share the sorrow of separation from loved ones. And we share with you the desire to love and to help, and "to keep our heart fit for His holy sight" as Ouida's favorite hymn puts it. — *Bob and Mary Lou Martin, The Church on the Hill, Kimberlin Heights, TN.*

The strength of your articles have added to my vision of knowing Jesus Christ and understanding His church. They have helped in times of trouble within the local Body; they have made me hurt more whenever I see the Body hurting or splitting; they have driven me to proclaim His majesty overseas, where I hope to be in 18 months. — *John A. Robinson, Vancouver, WA.*

May our Lord continue to *use* you to the *increased* love and brotherhood of His people. Give our love to Ouida. When our children were growing up Harold was gone so much, and I could not accompany him. I can empathize with you, Ouida. We admire you for your faithful ministry to your mother. — *Roxie Thomas, Conway, AR.*

(Many ask about Ouida's mother's condition. Soon to be 91, she is very frail and feeble and senile, but otherwise in good health. She occasionally fails, which is especially a problem to Ouida when I am not home since she cannot lift her by herself. Ouida was touched by the story of Mother Teresa who not only taught her nurses to succor the diseased and dying on the streets of Calcutta but to do it with joy. So she not only wants to care for her mother but to do it with joy, which I would say she does, beautifully. Mother

Pitts has now been with us five years, and, bless her heart, she still supposes she is just visiting, and frequently talks about going home to see her mother, who would be 120 if still living. What a mystery life is! — Ed.)

You might be interested to know that the West Amarillo and the Forest Hill churches merged last summer. We were sister congregations in the non-Bible class branch. Our leaders are all very compatible and working well together. Thank you for your love, for caring enough to stretch our minds through the years, for being sweet friends. — *Helen and David McCormack, Amarillo, TX.*

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BOOK NOTES

We have a new shipment of William Barclay's *The Plain Man's Book of Prayers* and *More Prayers for the Plain* Man, matching volumes and they are delightfully inspiring. They teach you how to pray, with Barclay giving advice on that subject as a preface to each of the books. We order them from Scotland, and they are available at $5.00 each or both for *$9.50,* including the postage.

In order to get this journal into the hands of more people we will continue to offer a free gratis copy of *The Stone*-Campbell Movement by Leroy Garrett to anyone who will send us 8 subs (new or renewal, including your own), at $3.00 per name, a total of *$24.00***.** Otherwise the book is $21.95, which is bargain enough for a 700-page study of our heritage. A new printing is off the press, which places the total over 10,000 copies, which is not bad for a history book.

Speaking of books on our heritage, a new one is due off the press, *Endangered Heritage***,** which I read with delight before it went to the printer. Super! Part of its significance is that is comes from an unknown (though Ouida and I have long known him) and from one who all these years has sat quietly in the pew, both observing and doing research. If you are a member of the Church of Christ or any part of the Campbell heritage, this book will shake you up. The author is an engineer, a member of the Highland Oaks Church of Christ in Dallas, and a diligent student of our heritage, named Walt Yancy. $12.95 postpaid, May delivery.

THE ONE-AIM RULE OF INTERPRETATION

The wisdom of God is as evident in adapting the light of the Sun of Righteousness to our spiritual or moral vision, as in adjusting the light of day to our eyes. The light reaches us without effort of our own, but we must open our eyes, and if our eyes be sound, we enjoy the natural light of heaven. There is a sound eye in reference to spiritual light, as well as in reference to material light.

The moral soundness of vision consists in having the eyes of the understanding fixed solely on God himself, his approbation and complacent affection for us. It is sometimes called a *single* eye because it looks for one thing supremely. Every one, then, who opens the Book of God, with *one aim,* with the ardent desire - intent only to know the will of God - to such a person the knowledge of God is easy. -*Alexander Campbell in* *The Christian System*

You believe that the great fundamental law of unity and love ought not to be violated to make way for exalting human opinions to an equality with express revelation, by making them articles of faith and terms of communion; so do we. -*Thomas Campbell in* *Declaration and Address*

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Address all mail to: 1201 Windsor Dr., Denton, TX 76201*

RESTORATION REVIEW is published monthly, except July and August, at 1201 Windsor Drive, Denton, Texas. Second class postage paid at Denton, Texas. SUBSCRIPTION RATES: $5.00 a year, or two years for $8.00; in clubs of four or more (mailed by us to separate addresses) $3.00 per name per year. (USPS 044450). POSTMASTER: Send Address changes to RESTORATION REVIEW, 1201 Windsor Dr., Denton, Texas 76201.